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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: LAURA BUSH, ABU MAZEN, AND FREEDOM

A First For The First Lady?

1. The government-owned Arabic daily "Oman" carried an article by Dr. Ali Abdulkarim bin Ali bin Jawad on May 25 entitled "Laura Bush's New Title?":

"Laura Bush's speech, in which she called on the people of the Middle East to cooperate for a brighter future, was notable for its positive and reserved language. She wanted to remind us about America's good deeds in the region. However, her carefully planned speech raises a number of questions. First, was the speech merely ceremonial with no political message, or was it a statement of American policy toward the region? Second, why was Laura Bush chosen to represent the United States at a summit where regional political issues were being discussed? Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice - a strong woman with an impressive career as an academic, a board member of Chevron, and most recently the U.S. National Security Advisor - could have represented the U.S. as both a government official and a modern woman of the new era. Political analysts suggest that Laura was intentionally chosen to improve America's image in the region."

Mr. Abbas Goes To Washington

2. On May 29, "Oman" ran an editorial under the headline "The U.S. Position On Palestine":

"We do not exaggerate when we say that Abu Mazen's visit to the United States was a success, and achieved more than even the Palestinians expected. In addition to the financial support that the U.S. promised to provide to the Palestinians after the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, it appears that Washington is moving towards a deeper understanding of the Palestinian position. Not only has Bush continued to voice his support for the establishment of a Palestinian state, but he also demanded that Israeli settlement activity be halted, and for troops to withdraw to their pre-Intifadha (September 2000) positions."

The Currency Of Freedom

3. The privately-owned Arabic daily "al-Watan" published an editorial on May 27 entitled "No Democracy Without Freedom":

"When Abu Mazen went to Washington, he brought with him a clear and well-organized `roadmap.' He stated that freedom and democracy are two faces of the same coin, and demanded freedom for his people before democracy could be demanded of the Palestinians. Abu Mazen went on to say that democracy in Palestine already exists, but is incomplete because the Israeli withdrawal has not taken place."

STEWART